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WITH A PREFACE BY THE RT. HON.

VISCOUNT HALIFAX

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PREFACE

BY THE RT. HON. VISCOUNT HALIFAX

THE record of Cardinal Mercier's life, the witness he bore to the duty of rulers and nations to be governed in their conduct by the principles of justice and righteousness, in a word by what they believe to be God's will, rather than by considerations based on a desire for their own aggrandisement, is known to the world. What is less known is what he was in himself, what he revealed of himself to those who had the honour and privilege of his acquaintance, and had been brought into contact with him in the intimacies of private life.

As one who had that privilege and enjoyed the Cardinal's hospitality for the five years during which the conversations in the interests of reunion were held under his presidency at Malines, the following few pages may not be out of place.

The record of the Cardinal's work as Professor in the University of Louvain, his various publications, the encouragement he gave to sound learning and exact theological teaching, the enlightened interest he took in European affairs, the respect and reverence, the deep regard and affection felt for him not only in Belgium but throughout the Continent, one might add throughout the world, fade into insignificance in comparison with the effect of his own personal character, and the influence which that character exerted on all who were brought into contact with it. That influence was not the result merely of great and special gifts, but of gifts developed and informed by a life spent in the constant presence of God and which was a living exemplification of those words of St. Paul, " Not I, but Christ living in me." It was a life, in regard to which that invisible world, which passes not away, was all in all, making the concerns of this world matters, in comparison, of little account.

There was, in his presence a sense of abiding peace, and of adjusted balance which made itself felt in every word he said, in every judgment he

pronounced. It was the consciousness of a sanctity existing in him, carrying with it an insight and acquaintance with the mind of Christ which gave an authority, which could not be gainsaid, to all he said and did. Possessed as the Cardinal was by the vision of that city of God of which St. Augustine speaks,—that ideal city which exemplifies those principles of order and justice, of truth and hope which it was God's purpose the world should exhibit—it was these principles that the Cardinal made it the business of his life to vindicate.

In the face of the political calculations, the worldly interests, the unchained passions which the Great War had let loose, it was he who was the defender of the eternal city of God, that City in which, despite all human perversity, the will of God is to reign supreme.

Surely there can be no greater blessing than to have been brought into contact with such a personality, to have been made acquainted in any degree with such a life, and to have been taught the lesson conveyed by them of what constitutes the real strength and value of human

life, and can alone give real and permanent success to all human effort.

To those who lament him, the Cardinal's death must seem an abiding sorrow, a calamity to the whole church, and, in a special manner, a calamity to the cause of reunion for which he had done, and was doing, so much,—but for himself the words must surely have rung out as he entered the Courts of Heaven, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

The Cardinal's last letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury before his illness, which the Archbishop allows me to publish, and which I had the Cardinal's leave to publish, may fitly conclude these few pages.

Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines
to
The Archbishop of Canterbury.

MALINES,
October 25th, 1925.

MY DEAR LORD,

As soon as I received your letter of August 1st I made a point of acknowledging it at once,

but I found myself compelled to ask for some delay in order to carefully consider its contents. This delay has been prolonged far beyond my expectation. Being accustomed as you are to the difficulties of a great administration, you will I trust excuse me and forgive this apparent neglect.

When I first read your Grace's letter it caused me certain uneasiness. I was not sure that I had entirely grasped its inner meaning. The document was inspired by unaltered goodwill, all appreciations of the past were encouraging, but reflections on the present situation and on future developments seemed to betray some diminution of confidence.

This was not surprising since, in so long and protracted an effort as ours, if the goal remains the same, the means to reach it will vary according to circumstances and raise new problems at every step.

In the course of our meetings, the line of demarcation between the subjects on which agreement already exists or has been arrived at and the subjects in regard to which differences still exist become more distinct, the difficulties

in the way of final success loom larger on the horizon and the reasons for hoping seem less convincing.

When, on the other hand, we listen to the voices on both sides of those outside our meetings, we notice a restlessness which it is not within our power to appease, and it may be that we, I mean Your Grace and myself, feel some anxiety and weariness which are not always easy to dispel.

Among our Roman Catholics, this restlessness assumes two aspects.

Some of them, full of enthusiasm and sympathy for our cause, complain of our apparent dilatoriness and of a silence which seems to them unduly prolonged. They are inclined to imagine that the problem of reunion being stated, like a theorem of geometry, its affirmative or negative solution ought to be reached immediately. If the worst came to the worst, they say, the vote of the majority would put an end to all hesitations. They would like to see the Malines conversations proceed more rapidly and thus satisfy, without further delay, the curiosity of public opinion.

Reunion would be such a beautiful and edifying spectacle that one could not provide too soon for the sake of the religious minded all the comfort they would derive from it.

Others, on the contrary, influenced by the policy of "all or nothing," consider only the final result, exaggerate purposely the difficulties which must be overcome before that result is reached, and undervalue the supreme part played by grace in the evolution of spiritual life.

Relying only upon themselves and upon the knowledge of their own weakness, they would readily abandon an attempt in which, it is true, they have never placed any confidence, and which, perhaps at the bottom of their hearts they had never favoured, and for the success of which they have perhaps never prayed.

Your Grace must, no doubt, meet with the same restlessness on the part of inveterate optimists and obstinate pessimists among your own flock; they wish to obtain from us an immediate solution, and, if they could, they would urge us to end the matter promptly.

Does not Your Grace think it would be weakness

on our part if we gave way to these solicitations? We have responsibilities which our followers do not share and do not always understand. Our situation imposes upon us the duty to consider the general situation from a higher standpoint, according to deeper supernatural standards. The direction of conscience, entrusted to us, allows us to act with authority.

Your Grace's letter mentions certain announcements which should be made, certain "statements" in which the points agreed upon by the two sides should be definitely outlined and in which the points still under discussion should be recalled.

I eagerly accept this proposal and am ready to place it on the agenda of our next meeting which might take place next January.

"Statements" might be prepared, the first on the conclusions already reached, the second on disputable points which have been partially considered or on new subjects which, according to the wish of one or both sides, ought still to be placed on the agenda.

This comparative survey would show, I

believe, that not only have our meetings brought hearts together, which is really a very appreciable result, but that they have also on important points harmonized our thoughts and achieved " progress in agreement."

The first " statement " on common conclusions might be developed in a more explicit form or be published in a reduced form. It would be a happy means of maintaining interest, the religious interest of our respective flocks.

In my humble opinion, however, it would be inopportune to publish the statements on disputable points.

Negative conclusions, whatever they may be, would provoke polemics in the press, reawaken secular animosities and accentuate divisions, thus harming the cause to which we have resolved to devote ourselves.

Faithful to our original purpose, we must bring to light progressively whatever favours reunion, and set aside or defer whatever stands in the way. Our original intention was not to examine, within a set time, a few questions of theology, exegesis or history, with the hope of adding a chapter of

apologetics or controversies to the scientific or religious works of our predecessors. On the contrary we met face to face like men of goodwill and sincere believers alarmed by the confusion of opinions and the divisions of thought prevailing in modern society, and saddened by the progress of religious indifference and of the materialistic conception of life which follows it. We had in mind the supreme wish for reunion, for unity expressed by our Divine Saviour: "Ut unum sint," "That they may be one." We set to work without knowing either when or how this union hoped for by Christ could be realized, but convinced that it could be realized since Christ desired it, and that we had, therefore, each one of us, to bring our contribution to its realization. Reunion is not our work and we may be unable to achieve it, but it is within our power, and consequently within our duty, to prepare it and *pave the way* for it.

Was it not for this high purpose that the Lambeth Conference was called together in a spirit of trust in the wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence?

Is this not the unique object pursued for more than fifty years by our dear and revered Colleague who devotes, with such admirable zeal, his time, his strength and his heart to the cause of reunion ?

I seem to hear the revered Dean of Wells addressing us in such moving words, at the close of our first meeting : For four centuries, Anglicans and Roman Catholics were only aware of their antagonisms and divisions ; they have met for the first time in order better to understand each other, to remove the misunderstandings which estrange them, to draw nearer to the goal so wished for by everyone ;—reunion.

When the revered Dean uttered these moving words, he did not merely address our small and limited group but the mass of believers which we knew were behind us and whose *perseverent* faith in Christ and in the Church is the object of our constant care and anxiety.

As far as I am concerned, it is in this light of apostleship that I have looked upon my contribution to these conversations from the first day when Lord Halifax and the Abbé Portal expressed the wish that I should join them.

When, in January, 1924, I explained to my clergy and to my diocese the part which I had taken in our conversations, I dwelt on the same point. I reminded them of the words of Leo XIII: "The great events of history cannot be gauged by human calculations." Foreseeing and fearing their impatience I recalled to them the teaching of St. Paul as to the unique source of the fruitfulness of apostleship: "So then, neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase"—"neque qui plantat est aliquid neque qui rigat sed qui incrementum dat, Deus." (I Cor. iii, 7.) And I *acted* these words which I beg leave to repeat here; "You are getting impatient, success is slow to come, your trouble appears wasted. Be on your guard, nature and her eagerness mislead you; an effort of charity is never lost."

Reapers of souls, we must sow in the sweat of our brow, mostly in tears, before the hour of reaping strikes. When this blessed hour does strike, another very likely will have filled our place: "Alius est qui seminat, alius est qui metit." (St. John iv. 38.)

It is in this spirit of Christian patience and supernatural confidence that we shall meet again in January next, content to labour and to sow, leaving to the Holy Spirit and to the working of His grace the choice of the day and the hour for reaping the crop which our humble works and our prayers endeavour to prepare.

For this also and above all we must declare: We associate ourselves as students, it is true, but our association is chiefly spiritual and joins in common prayer. The knowledge of our mere existence and of our periodical meetings is, for the general public, a constant exhortation to religious thought and collective prayer for re-union.

I am, My dear Lord,

Your Grace's obedient servant,

(*Sgd.*) D. J. Card. Mercier,

Arch. de Malines.

CONTENTS

Chap.		Page
	PREFACE BY THE RT. HON. VISCOUNT HALIFAX - - - -	v
I.	THE MERCIER FAMILY; COLLEGE DAYS -	1
II.	"THE GRAND SEMINAIRE"; PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES AT LOUVAIN; INFLUENCE ON THE CLERGY OF MALINES - -	10
III.	AN ORDER FROM LEO XIII; THE ABBE MERCIER INTRODUCES THOMISM IN LOUVAIN - - - -	17
IV.	THE STAGES OF NEO-THOMISM; ITS DIFFICULTIES, ITS PROGRESS, ITS DREAMS -	25
V.	PROFESSOR MERCIER, ARCHBISHOP AND CARDINAL; HIS INTELLECTUALISM, HIS MYSTICISM - - - -	35
VI.	THE PASTORAL WORK OF CARDINAL MERCIER; ITS SPIRIT OF FRATERNITY AND LOVE - - - -	42
VII.	THE INCREASING INFLUENCE OF THE CARDINAL; HIS PATRIOTISM - -	52
VIII.	THE CARDINAL AGAINST GERMANY; HIS MORAL VICTORY - - -	57
IX.	CARDINAL MERCIER'S PERSONALITY; HIS DAILY SUBMISSION TO PRESENT DUTY	71

I

THE MERCIER FAMILY

COLLEGE DAYS

THE Merciers have been Belgian for the last two centuries; before that time they were French. After sojourning in various places in Southern Belgium, they settled, early in the eighteenth century, at Braine-l'Alleud, a large village of the Walloon Brabant. It is a district of rich arable and pasture land, and they started life as farmers. Gradually, however, they were tempted by trade. The Cardinal's grandfather (who was Burgomaster of Braine for so many years that he was known as the old Burgomaster) ran a tannery. The family was then prosperous and occupied a fine country house, called the "château du Bastangier."

Had the old Burgomaster allowed him to do so, his son Pierre-Léon would have gone to Paris to study and might have earned a certain reputation as a painter. As it was, though he

had real undeniable talent, his fame did not pass beyond the family circle. But the filial obedience, which kept him in Brabant, did not fetter the activity of his mind. He dabbled in mathematics, civil engineering and literature; and thus, deprived of other means of migration, escaped from the narrow confines of Braine. The revolutionary days of 1830 provided him with another means of escape. With three other Merciers, kinsmen of his, he rushed to Brussels to fight for Belgian liberty. The name of Mercier occurs four times in the list of men from Braine who risked their lives to give birth to modern Belgium. Even when they had property, the Merciers were not the slaves of comfort; the ideas of right and freedom were powerful enough to lure them from their comfortable surroundings, to wander far from home.

There may be corners of the earth where imagination is lulled to sleep, but Braine invites it to soar through time and space. Above the fields hover memories which are by no means bucolic,—epic memories, memories of Waterloo. Napoleon's last battle—in which the Eagle broke

its wings—was fought in this neighbourhood, and two neighbouring farms long bore traces of it. The first, "La Papelotte," occupied during those decisive hours by the Prince of Saxe-Weimar,[1] belonged to a member of the Mercier family; the other belonged to the Charlier family, in which Pierre-Léon Mercier was later to find his wife. Thus one great European war left deep marks on the family history of the Merciers and of the Charliers. A greater and more than European war was, a hundred years later, to give immortal fame to the son of a Mercier and a Charlier.

This son was born on the 21st November, 1851, the fifth of seven children. The premature death of his father left his mother Berthe sole guardian of the orphans. She was obliged to sell a distillery on which her husband had counted for the means of bringing up his family. She was also obliged to sell the old home and move to a small house near Braine Church.

With the consolations of religion close at hand the bereaved seemed less forlorn. Some distant relatives in Brussels (one of whom had even been

[1] Henry Houssaye, 1815, *Waterloo*, p. 306.

for a short time Minister) prophesied a brilliant future for the little Désiré. They promised to become his patrons if he qualified for the Civil Service, where, with luck, he might rise to be chief of a department.

Barbe Mercier's dreams did not wander to such heights. They were centred around the altar before which she daily knelt. This was the only height within reach of her unhappy self,—the only height she wished her son to climb. The four elder sisters, clustered around their mother, began to lead a life of privation in order to realize her wish and to gather together, little by little, sufficient to educate the boy. Barbe had a brother, the Abbé Antoine Charlier, who was Dean of Virginal; and a half-brother, the Abbé Croquet, who after serving for a time as priest at Braine had spent forty years as a missionary among the Red Indians,—they called him "the Oregon Saint." Little Désiré would doubtless wish to follow their example. This was the only joy which the unhappy family still continued to expect from life.

Désiré Mercier was a pupil first at the Episcopal

College of St. Rombaut, in Malines, and then at the Small Seminary in the same town. His wishes coincided with his mother's. He remembered the steady and lofty aspirations of his youth when, at a later date, in a familiar and earnest talk he gave to a gathering of young men his views on *Ideals and Illusions*. He would not have the ideal lowered to the level of a vague and ill-defined dream, nor would he have people shirk the stern duties imposed by it. "The ideal," he declared, "is something precise and plain; it is a clear conception of duty. We must remain faithful to it until the end." At an age when other young men indulge in dreams, he had a yearning in accord with his vocation: he wanted to be one who loves God and brings others to love Him. In the struggling family, all enthusiasm and suffering, all exaltation and despondence, all hope and despair, became the active helpers of this vocation, which grew like the flower of a collective Christian life and bloomed modestly in the episcopal town of Malines, tended and warmed unceasingly by the distant prayers of the little house at Braine.

The Cardinal remembered with tenderness three of his early masters: M. Robert, who taught him to obey; M. La Force, who taught him to work and to persevere; and M. Pieraerts, who taught him to dare.[1] The holidays brought Désiré Mercier back to Braine; there he met other masters who won his heart for ever,—Catholic workmen. Without knowing it, they gave him lessons in psychology. "It is often profitable," he said later, "to receive such lessons from the people. The workman thinks aloud. His spontaneous language ignores all artifice. No one will help you better to read the depths of the interior life."[2]

With his comrades of Braine, Mercier became a "Mamelouk"; it was the beginning of his public life. "Mamelouk" was the nickname given by the Liberals to the "Xavériens" who, under the patronage of St. Francis Xavier, organized the catholic forces of the locality. This nickname was accepted as a title of glory, and, every Sunday, all the Mamelouks, workmen and

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 81.
[2] *Ibid.*, III, p. 109.

employers, clerics and laymen, went down the "chemin de l'Estrée" to drink a few mugs of beer and "to compete at cards or skittles for the prize, a rabbit or a couple of pigeons."[1] With his boyish love of fun, Désiré Mercier took part in the contests; he tried to win the rabbit and sometimes succeeded. The evening ended in long talks with those whom, after half a century, the Cardinal still called "our dear Brainois workmen." One day, the Brussels delegates of the International came to Braine; after two meetings, the "Xavériens" remained masters of the field. Désiré Mercier felt himself becoming a champion in this victorious company.

At the gatherings of the Xavériens, where he sharpened his combative temperament, he saw how religion softens social antagonism and subdues every kind of vanity. Taken together, they were Catholics, a company in the Catholic army which, periodically, at election time, hoisted the catholic programme like a flag. As a conscript in this army, Désiré Mercier accustomed himself to associate the idea of social brotherhood with

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, pp. 292–294.

religious fervour. His later conception of the social attitude of the Christian was inspired by the spirit of comradeship which brought the Mamelouks of his native place together in games, in meetings and in elections.

The student of Malines, the Mamelouk of Braine, had not the light-heartedness of the youths who are surrounded by the semblance of happiness as by a fragile stage scenery. He felt burdens that weighed him down and sufferings that pressed upon him, and these sufferings awoke in the depths of his soul a sympathetic echo which gave him, from his early days, the capacity for and gift of sympathy which are the privilege of a cheerless childhood. When suffering spends itself in compassion, it can never become languid. Amidst the austere surroundings in which the young student spent his holidays, he developed a certain spontaneity, an all-conquering initiative, an active generosity which, notwithstanding all, gave him happiness and radiated joy at home also. Désiré Mercier set out cheerfully on a stern and severe life guided by one principle only ; to place himself at the disposal of God and of those

who, for him, represented God. The wide and varied intellectual interests inherited from his father were disciplined and made fruitful by the steadiness of this aim, which added the sovereign wealth of unity to the wealth of his own nature.

II

THE "GRAND SEMINAIRE"

PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES AT LOUVAIN—INFLUENCE ON THE CLERGY OF MALINES

TWO years of philosophical studies in the Small Seminary of Malines did not infuse much enthusiasm into young Mercier. His bright intelligence could not be satisfied with a lifeless philosophy which was only a timid eclecticism more or less disguised under a scholastic livery, with too little strength of its own to inspire confidence in others. He found, however, in theology, as it was taught in the Great Seminary, some compensation for his disillusionment. Here, at least, he discovered a true synthesis, sure of itself, harmoniously built; he read the *Summa* and loved it. In philosophy also St. Thomas had built his edifice securely. What was the advantage of substituting for the philosophical structure of Thomism, as was done in certain Catholic colleges, those

composite buildings, in which each thinker recognized some stone bearing his sign manual, and, exposed successively to every wind of heaven shook under every gale? Such was the question which the young cleric put to himself and solved later on. Each in its own order however; he must first become a priest and this was the work in which he was at present engaged.

He aimed at something higher than an intellectual mastery of theology. His constant familiarity with the writings of the Fathers, his daily intercourse with those of St. Paul, tended to make of him not a specialist in sacred science, but an apostle of Jesus Christ. When he learned the Epistles by heart, and began to translate them in such a personal and suggestive way, it was not as an expositor, but as one who wanted to impregnate his soul "with those great thoughts which gave to Christianity its earliest moral direction."[1] He educated himself for the sake of the souls which he one day would have to educate, and regarded his studies as an apprenticeship to work, not as an intellectual

[1] *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 102.

enjoyment. His vocation directed his intellectual labour; deep and sudden intuitions, which opened before him vast horizons of study, were systematically put aside; he mortified all aspirations which did not tend directly towards the education of the future priest. He spent three years in the seminary in preparation for the half-hour of early service, on April 6th, 1874, when, for the first time, he consecrated the host. On the *Memento* of his ordination, he wrote: "To God the joy of my youth." This happy youth wished for nothing more than a post in some parish where he could impart God's Word and Life, and celebrate every day "this unique moment of the world's history,"[1] the eucharistic sacrifice.

His superiors had already chosen his career; they sent him to the University of Louvain. Obedience was all the easier because it enabled him to open his whole being to the world of thought and yet retire frequently to that world of the soul where the Voice of God is heard in the silence.[2]

[1] *Œuvres Pastorales*, III, p. 253.
[2] Mercier, *A mes Séminaristes*, p. 40.

Such philosophical teaching as was provided at Louvain at that time did not give the students any definite philosophy; it suggested at the most the need of such a philosophy while tempering the suggestion with a certain fear.

Louvain, in the middle of the nineteenth century, had had an original and authentic philosophical school and had suffered in consequence. This school had experienced trouble. At its head was a very earnest and saintly man, Professor Ubaghs.[1] Distressed by the attacks of Rationalism upon Faith, he had experienced a certain revengeful pleasure in seeing Lamennais, Bonald, Bautain and others humiliate Reason and make Tradition the only or principal source of moral and metaphysical truth. But Rome did not want to see Reason too much despised. Impartially and generously, in spite of the rationalist peril, she defended human Reason against the attacks of Traditionalism. Ubaghs therefore resumed his campaign with more discretion. He still maintained Bonald's idea, according to which individual reason, physically

[1] Mercier, *Critériologie Générale*, p. 127.

dependent upon Society and Revelation, must necessarily take from them its first convictions of God, the soul, and moral obligation; but he added, as a concession to the Holy See, that as soon as it possessed this first knowledge, Reason was capable of demonstrating for itself the legitimacy of the Faith which it professed. Rome was not satisfied with this concession; a warning, in 1843, and a formal condemnation, in 1864, cut short the hopes awakened by the school of Ubaghs. Louvain had flattered herself that she could offer Rome weapons against Reason, and Rome had broken these weapons. As so often happens after similar catastrophes, the succeeding generation of philosophers rather dreaded having a system or even a reputation. They knew how to discuss, but not how to build.

The young Abbé Mercier being asked by one of them to present a refutation of Positivism, experienced such a shock as often leads the student to outstrip his professor, and he became convinced not only of the need of transcendental notions, but also of the urgent need of building a metaphysical structure truly balanced, truly synthetic.

His enthusiasm for St. Thomas and for the invaluable book of the Jesuit Kleutgen on Thomism increased. This constant intercourse with the mediæval Doctor was faithfully pursued when, in October, 1877, Abbé Mercier became Director of Philosophical studies in the Small Seminary of Malines. He never dreamed, at that time, that he would become the originator of a vast Thomist movement; he was as modest as his Louvain masters. He had made for himself a rule, to which he remained constant, not to anticipate through personal petulance the moment when his energies would be ripe for God's reaping. He was too much a man of duty to be a man of dreams.

His duty was, in Louvain, to carry on his studies and at the same time to exercise a friendly and cordial supervision over the lay students of the Papal College, future jurists and doctors, of whom he had, in spite of his youth, been made "sous-régent." In Malines, his duty was to carry on his professorship and at the same time to exercise a spiritual direction over many of the seminarists, whom he longed to see taking the

decisive and irrevocable step of devoting their lives to Jesus Christ. There are many Belgian priests for ever grateful to him for having urged them in this direction. He asked of them, in the dawn of their youth, nothing less than what was called in the seventeenth century, conversion, the renunciation of self for the Divine service. With this joyful and moving daily task was associated the preoccupations of the scholar. Had there been any need it would have purified him from all personal ambition and feverish restlessness with regard to the future; it certainly absorbed the best of his powers.

III

AN ORDER FROM LEO XIII

THE ABBE MERCIER INTRODUCES THOMISM IN LOUVAIN

THE hour was approaching when Abbé Mercier's duty would be to become the head of a school, the initiator of an intellectual movement, and to recognise that this end, determined by authority, must henceforth direct his daily work ; this hour was fixed by Leo XIII.

Leo had long considered St. Thomas as the doctor most competent to " smooth the way of Revelation." As early as 1879, the encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* ordered the Thomist philosophy to be revived in catholic teaching. This at first produced in the schools of Rome a strange mixture of hesitation and obedience ; but obedience prevailed at last, for the tenacity of the Pope was well known. In Rome, at the time, catholic thought was more disposed to erect barriers than to extend ; its attitude was more defensive than

aggressive. Thomism, as it was taught by these first Roman doctors, preferred neglecting modern science to assimilating it, accepting its vivifying influence and vivifying it in turn. It showed a certain arrogance which perhaps masked a certain timidity.[1]

Leo XIII did not think that the Church of God should be timid. There should be no timidity towards history, therefore the archives of the Vatican were opened under the eyes of their frightened custodians ; no timidity towards democracy, and popular pilgrimages entered St. Peter's through the gate which formerly opened only to kings ; no timidity towards social problems, and the Pope began, in a secular age, to concern himself with the affairs of this world ; no timidity towards science, and, at Christmas, 1880, Leo invited Cardinal Dechamps, Archbishop of Malines, to found a chair of Thomist philosophy in that great home of the sciences, the University of Louvain.

The memory of such learned men as David of Dinant, Henri of Ghent, Siger of Brabant and

[1] See C. Besse, *Deux Centres du Mouvement thomiste, Rome et Louvain* (*Revue du Clergé français*, Jan.–Feb., 1902).

Gilles of Lessines showed that the Belgian mind could adapt itself to the complexities of scholasticism; and the past history of Louvain, which had represented Catholic culture in opposition to the Reformation, justified the hope that the University might again become the centre of this culture. Leo XIII did not wish to encourage an esoteric teaching whispering truths into the ear of a few well-protected seminarists, precious, ancient, and fragile; he wished for an open-air, radiating Thomism, a Thomism for laymen "which would carve Christian philosophy deeply in the minds" of the Louvain students, future deputies and ministers.

We have seen how, after Ubaghs' misfortunes, Louvain had grown weary of philosophy. The social rights of the Church, the differences between "hypothesis" and "thesis," the compatibility of the principles of the *Syllabus* with the Belgian Constitution, had provoked between the economist Charles Périn and the liberal Catholics somewhat heated discussions which had still further scared the bishops. It seemed to them that when the educational policy of the

Frère-Orban Ministry was imperilling the souls of little children, there was something better to do than wasting time in theoretical polemics. The opening of primary schools seemed far more urgent than philosophy . . . but Leo had spoken ; he demanded that Thomism should enter Louvain and influence Belgian public life through a new method of philosophical instruction. The bishops, docile and astonished, meditated over his wish, but their meditations did not bring forth any result.

They were still wavering when they suddenly heard that, after having given him the mitre, Leo was about to send them a cleric from Italy, a great expert in Thomism, and that all that they had to do was to give him, in Louvain, a room and some students. They at once begged for patience and endeavoured to find a prompt solution to the Pontifical suggestion. " Let us take Abbé Mercier, your director of philosophy," said to Cardinal Dechamps, Mgr Du Rousseau, Bishop of Tournai, who, some years before, when he was Director of the Malines Seminary, had had the young priest under his authority. " Will that be good ? " asked the Cardinal.—" So good,"

replied the Bishop, " that if I were your Eminence, I should regret his loss."—" Well, let us nominate him," said the unresisting Cardinal, " the Pope will be pleased." And Leo was indeed pleased.[1]

The " great Abbé," as he was called by his pupils since his ordination, went to Rome, in 1882, during the holidays, to see the great Pope, and their views agreed. Leo's wide outlook showed the way to Abbé Mercier. It showed him that he must " go ahead." The Pope did not only wish that " the principles of Catholic philosophy should be applied in order that the physical and natural sciences should yield the utmost of which they were capable," but he also took into account the fact that the schoolmen of old had prepared themselves for their work as philosophers by the study of physical and natural sciences. Leo had paid homage to the scientific culture of the schoolmen a quarter of a century before, the admirable historical labours of the physicist Duhem,[2] had avenged the

[1] The story of Mgr Mercier's work at Louvain has been told by Chanoine Noël, one of his distinguished disciples, in a series of lectures delivered recently at the *Institut Catholique de Paris*.

[2] See the article of M. Albert Dufourcq, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, July 15th, 1913.

scorn in which the ignorant writers of the eighteenth century had held them. Professor Mercier, suddenly entering upon this inheritance of the old masters, found in this homage an inspiring lesson and promptly resolved to enlarge his scientific knowledge constantly.

About this time, Charcot had, among his pupils, a Doctor Mercier—who was no other than the future Cardinal. Soon after we find him at Louvain. He had shaved the beard, which he had let grow in Paris, and he put away in some drawer the tie-pin, formed of two eagles, which he had used whilst attending Charcot's lessons. He was again the "grand Abbé"; in whose habit, the only one he loved, he was in turn professor and student. It was indeed flattering to be a professor and to owe his position to the Pope, but would he have any students? The students heard that "the new teaching would be something like a course of archæology, the respectful exhumation of old theories,—interesting perhaps, and happening to please the reigning Pope."[1]

[1] Toast proposed by S. Deploige at the banquet given to celebrate the Episcopal consecration of Mgr Mercier.

They were curious enough to go and see for themselves; they went again and stayed. The future Cardinal was expounding, before an audience largely lay, his psychology, his logic, his criteriology, and his ontology, which were later to appear in book form. "What struck us and won us over," explained one of his best pupils not long ago, "was the intense personal conviction of everything he did and said. Nothing conventional, studied, or stilted; but always the free and spontaneous communication of his most intimate life, of his truest feelings, of his sincerest thoughts. Such was the constant method of his teaching and his guidance. To lay bare one's soul, one must be, if not perfect, at least free from the weaknesses which discredit and ruin all authority, one must posssess a scrupulously upright mind clear of all servitude and self-conceit, one must have a fresh young soul, always ready to forget itself and to spend itself freely. He possessed this youth, this devotion, this rectitude of mind, this zeal for the ideal and that is why our young souls attached themselves to his."[1]

[1] Miles, *Correspondant*, February 10th, 1916, p. 418.

The warmth and impetus survived the lecture and led the professor to the research room, where his colleagues were clearing each his own small corner of the scientific field. He specially liked to linger with the neurologist Van Gehuchten ; and, after speaking as a master from the chair, he became in these studious researches a humble student and apprentice.

Leo XIII was watching him from afar. In 1886, he conferred upon him a Roman prelacy. He contemplated with delight the splendid work of this solitary pioneer, audaciously throwing a bridge across the gap separating the speculations of the Middle Ages from the most modern methods of observation. Gradually the Pope realized that, in order to make philosophy the synthesis of the sciences, more than one man was wanted—even if this man was a Mercier—and also more than one Chair. What was wanted, was an Institute with a series of special chairs where " picked young men should be trained in the study of pure science for its own sake." In 1888 and 1889, two Pontifical briefs developed these views and these views were authoritative.

IV

THE STAGES OF NEO-THOMISM

ITS DIFFICULTIES, ITS PROGRESS, ITS DREAMS

IN 1891, in his report to the Malines Congress, Mgr Mercier discussed the briefs. He showed the ever-widening field of science, and the urgent need for Catholics to cultivate it. " You resign yourselves too readily to play the secondary part of 'adepts' of science," he declared to his Catholic audience, " and too few of you are eager to work at creative science, too few are willing to gather and to fashion the materials from which in the future, the new synthesis of Christian science and philosophy must be built."[1] He wanted to draw Catholics towards pure science, cultivated for its own sake with no professional or directly apologetic purpose. He wanted them to be seekers whose discoveries should later on be systematized by philosophy, and patient

[1] Mercier, *Rapport sur les Études Supérieures de Philosophie*, p. 76.

analysts whose work should be completed by philosophical synthesis.

Comte and Taine had already dreamed, each in his own way, of a philosophy in which all knowledge would be unified. The means of unification were being created in Louvain. The "Institut Supérieur de Philosophie," over which Mgr Mercier presided, contained beside his own chair, other chairs in which colleagues of the other Faculties prepared, each in his own domain for the convergence of the sciences towards unity.

A day came—it was in 1893—when Mgr Mercier's own pupils, his own intellectual children, were in numbers and in learning equal to filling, around their master, the various chairs of the Institute. M. Nys, professed cosmology; M. de Wulf, the history of scholasticism; M. Thiéry, physics; M. Deploige, sociology,—four laymen, two of whom later became priests. The Institute was a kind of spiritual family. The same spirit animated the teaching of all the professors, which gave the impression of being not merely contiguous but co-ordinated. This

collective work had its organ, the *Revue néo-scolastique*, and a home worthy of it, a fine Gothic building planned by the future minister Helleputte, a personal friend of the future Cardinal. Leo's Seminary opened its gates to the young priests who came to join the lay students in the Institute, and a Pontifical brief of 1894 fixed its place in the general scheme of the University.

One thing, however, was still needed to give this work a supreme consecration : the sufferings of its creator. The Louvain Institute was the outcome of an impulse from Rome ; it was, properly speaking, a Roman thought planted in Belgian soil by a man who knew how to make it grow. Among the higher Belgian clergy, all, or nearly all, had accepted the new Institute with a deferential curiosity. But the very reserve which gave this curiosity an air of expectation left Mgr Mercier somewhat open to attack by a combination of jealousies. Some murmured that his Thomism cost Belgian charity too much, and that the money spent on novelties would be sorely missed at the next elections. Others asked if Thomism, as taught at Louvain, was really an

authentic Thomism ; and observed that, speaking French, it employed a language which was not that of St. Thomas,—an observation which subsequent events proved aimed high and carried far.

The combined efforts shook the confidence of Rome in Mgr Mercier ; a formidable assault was delivered. One day, in 1886, Mgr Mercier started suddenly for Rome to parry the blows. Some of his enemies preceded and others followed him to block all means of access, and ensure his returning disheartened. Nothing of the kind happened. He might easily have got out of his difficulties elegantly by accepting an honorary post in a large parish of Brussels : but he refused. Abdication implies doubt ; he believed in his work. Through the critical days which followed, he never despaired. Carved on his mantelpiece was the inscription : *Labora sicut bonus miles Christi*, work as a good soldier of Christ. He used to show it to his students, he obeyed it himself, pursuing steadily and humbly his menaced work.

Leo continued to watch. He noticed that in

spite of the local denunciations directed against its Chief, the Louvain School was spreading and that small centres of Thomist revival were being founded in distant places; that Mgr Mercier's students were translating his works into various languages, and that the *Revue néo-scolastique* was circulating more and more widely.[1] These successes were due to the spirit which inspired the School as well as to the language which it used which enabled it also to pursue its missionary work among laymen. In 1898, the Louvain Institute received, in a letter from Cardinal Satolli, a testimony of the approval of Rome and permission to use the French language; and when, at the end of 1900, Leo received in audience the pilgrims of the Institute, he proudly said to them: "I am glad to see at your head the professors of the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie founded by me. The higher studies directed by Mgr Mercier are not only useful to the clergy, but also to laymen who come to study philosophy even after having obtained other diplomas. This

[1] Pelzer, *l'Institut supérieur de philosophie à l'Université catholique de Louvain.* (1890–1904), p. 20.

is the reason why, though agreeing that the philosophy of St. Thomas should be studied in Latin we have decided that the lectures shall be given in French. I earnestly desire the prosperity of my Institute."[1]

The Institute *founded by me, my* Institute; such were the expressions used by Leo of the school which he was supposed to have disavowed four years before. Professor Mercier's enemies had failed badly. While intending to hurt him, they had unwillingly and unknowingly revealed the man of patient and indomitable energy, equal to all trials, who, one day, was to astonish other enemies and bring down the conqueror's pride.

The Institute had weathered a storm which endangered its life, and St. Thomas continued to rise upon the intellectual horizon. Mgr Mercier was not the man to adopt subserviently the views of a master; he frequently reminded his students that St. Thomas would have been the first to condemn those who would have subjected their minds to his, and that, at the beginning of

[1] *Revue Néo-scolastique*, February, 1901, p. 84.

the *Summa*, he warns us not to exaggerate the value of the argument from authority.[1] After expressing his admiration for the Thomist psychology, he hastened to add: "Does this mean that we should consider the School's psychology as a finished monument of science before which our minds should dwell in a sterile contemplation? Certainly not; psychology is a living science; it must develop with the biological and anthropological sciences which are its auxiliaries."[2]

He admitted that, if wrongly employed, the scholastic method had its drawbacks, and he recognized, on the other hand, that modern philosophy could be useful to Neo-thomism, first by stating the problem of the value of knowledge and secondly by prompting the development of scientific observation and experiment in psychology.[3] In short, he did not consider Thomist philosophy "as an ideal which it is forbidden to surpass, nor as a barrier setting

[1] Mercier, *Logique*, 5th ed., 1909, p. 48, n. 1.
[2] *Psychologie*, 6th ed., 1903, I, p. 1.
[3] Mercier, *Logique*, 5th ed., p. 349.—*Les origines de la psychologie contemporaine*, 2nd ed., p. 468.

limits to the activity of the mind," but he maintained, "after due consideration, that wisdom and modesty advise us to take it at least as a starting point and base."[1]

He confronted Thomism with the old classic spiritualism, fathered by Descartes, in which he found an "anti-scientific prejudice" which opposed psychology to physics and studied the soul and the body as two distinct entities, without considering their union. He showed how this original error veiled to the spiritualists of the nineteenth century the problem raised by the progress of biology, and how the research workers were thus gradually led towards a materialistic interpretation of psychic life.[2] Scholasticism, on the contrary, possessed at the same time a systematic doctrine and outlines large enough to admit and synthesize the increasing results of the sciences of observation.

These sciences were gathered together and equipped in Louvain. Addressing his young research workers, Mgr Mercier said: "Let us avoid the

[1] Mercier, *Logique*, 5th ed., p. 48, n. 1. Cf. de Wulf, *Introduction à la philosophie néo-scolastique*, 1904.

[2] Mercier, *Psychologie*, 6th ed., I, pp. 1 and 6, II, p. 271.

attitude of those who, confronted with the thousand and one small, precise facts whose patient and minute study is at once the strength and the honour of contemporary science, ask themselves with an ill-disguised scorn what is the good of it? Nothing is more unscientific than this selfish preoccupation. Facts are facts; their existence justifies their study. Besides, if they are good for nothing to-day, they will be good for something to-morrow; they are the materials which will help to build the more comprehensive syntheses of the future."[1]

They were storing up results. Thanks to the riches accumulated in our time, their descendants will be able to build syntheses in accord with the common ancestor St. Thomas. The laboratories were enriched and increased their equipment sometimes along with their knowledge,—the laboratory of psychophysiology became famous.[2] Part of this scientific work was later

[1] Mercier, *Psychologie*, 6th ed., I, p. 2.

[2] In his note published by the *Chronique de l'Institut de Philosophie*, for January, 1914, Chanoine Noël gives a clear outline of the work of the Institute up to the destruction of the University by the Germans.

to be destroyed by the flames of Kultur. The University of Louvain, the first to condemn Luther,[1] had formerly sinned against Germany and was now duly punished. But the flames of Kultur go out, while the light of the spirit remains. The work begun by Mgr Mercier was intended to last long ; in his mind he saw distant generations linked to it. The impulse which he had given survived the War, as, in 1906, it survived his departure from Louvain.

[1] Delannoy, *l'Université de Louvain*, p. 104.—Noël, *Louvain*, p. 110.

V

PROFESSOR MERCIER

ARCHBISHOP AND CARDINAL— HIS INTELLECTUALISM, HIS MYSTICISM

ONE of the characteristics of great initiators is that they are able to withdraw themselves from their work without endangering it. It possesses a life of its own independently of its originator. Having devoted themselves to it with no selfish afterthought, they are able, on the appointed day, to let it drop from them like a ripe fruit from the tree; in the complete disinterestedness of their soul they may even experience the joy of sacrifice. In 1906, Pius X imposed this sacrifice on Mgr Mercier by making him Archbishop of Malines and Cardinal. He had to leave unfinished his course of philosophy just when after long preparation he was about to outline his conception of the Deity; he had to part from those young men who, for the last twenty-five years, had formed his spiritual circle. To

belong to them was still to belong to himself,—he loved them so. The Papal decision reminded him that he belonged to God alone. He accepted his new field of action and at once settled in it.

As he threw himself completely and at once into his new work, the personality of the professor shone through that of the Archbishop of Malines. Taking leave of his students, he talked to them of the responsibilities of his new office: "Dear students, I will not fear," said he, and he reminded them of the remark of the Italian psychologist Mosso, that, in an equal fight, the one who is afraid is bound to be vanquished.[1] In his first "Charge," he quoted another psychologist, William James, in regard to the mysterious forces which help the soul of the believer to triumph over suffering, and he added: "You will be gratified to hear the truths of our Gospel and of our Christian experience confirmed by the most disinterested scientific observations."[2] Claude Bernard was in turn enlisted to justify, in the light of physiology, Bossuet's assertion that the expression *we shall*

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 22.
[2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 60.

die is insufficient since *we die* daily.[1] Bossuet was to the Cardinal "the greatest thinker of modern times,"[2] but he nevertheless appealed to a scientist to confirm his words. A lecture on the necessity of a Liturgy, delivered in 1910, based its arguments on the study of the "herd-instinct," and concluded that, given the nature of collective humanity, the Church was bound to make us pray as she does.[3] Another time a scholastic axiom inspired a homily: "Habitual impressions cease to move us, *ab assuetis non fit passio.*" In confirmation of these five words the Cardinal pointed out to his priests that "they had grown too familiar with the spectacle of death to apply their minds vigorously to it."[4] On his arrival from Louvain, he did not look askance at the interest which his priests might take in philosophy. At the end of a Pastoral Letter on God, he added for their benefit a note in Latin upon Theodicy, and, in a sermon on the orientation of life, he explained

[1] Mercier, *Retraite Pastorale*, p. 99.
[2] *Œuvres Pastorales*, III, p. 180.
[3] *Ibid.*, III, p. 55.
[4] *Retraite Pastorale*, p. 89.

to them, in technical terms, how their very dependence implied the existence of God.[1]

He thus brought from Louvain his familiar intellectual methods, his habits of thought and his philosophical language ; above all, he brought a fine confidence in human intelligence. According to him, Catholicism " is synonymous with an ever broadening mind . . . Christ does not invite humanity to intellectual bondage, but to share the higher liberty of the children of light." He brought also a fine confidence in science. As Archbishop, he affirmed anew : " Despite what peevish or faithless men may say, Science is recording some definite success every day ; it is advancing." He showed the same confidence in the educative force of reflection. Speaking to his Seminarists, he said : " In the same way that grace does not take the place of nature, but adds itself to it and acts through it, your Christian perfection, and consequently your sacerdotal education, depend on your power of reflection."[2] He unceasingly proclaimed the

[1] *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 194, and *Retraite Pastorale*, p. 72.
[2] *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 320 ; II, pp. 12, 275.

dignity, the value and the efficacy of our thinking faculty. " In the kingdom of philosophy, unity is the law, but the sceptre belongs only to the intelligence."[1] These are the last words of the address *Vers l'Unité* which he delivered, in 1913, as President of the Belgian Royal Academy.

The Cardinal was not one of those intellectuals who measure intelligence by the power of abstraction. On the contrary, this Néo-scholastic mistrusted the preponderance of abstractions both in matters pertaining to the inner life and in science. It is the task of the scientist to observe natural facts, as it is the task of the Christian soul to contemplate supernatural facts. Sheer abstraction ought no more to be encouraged in the oratory than in the laboratory. In some wonderfully subtle pages, the Cardinal warned his clergy against a purely intellectual conception of meditation which would reduce it to an intense concentration of thought: " Meditation is not a lonely, intellectual exercise, but intercourse between the soul and the living God ; its principal object is not an abstract truth to be cultivated

[1] *Revue Néo-scolastique*, August, 1913, p. 253.

in the interest of the mental faculties, it is our Lord Himself, His Personality, His teaching, His example and His works." The Cardinal recommended such meditation as a counterpoise to the aridity due to much study, and his intimate friends knew that his advice to his clergy revealed the secret of his own life.[1]

For the Cardinal had a secret, a secret with God. When, a few years ago, Janssens wanted to paint his portrait, he attended, every Sunday, in the Cathedral of Malines, the evening service regularly conducted by the Prelate, and observed him while he prayed. The inner rhythm of the Cardinal's life was always based on a perfect balance between study and prayer,—prayer rendering thanks for study and study rendering thanks, to a certain extent, for the benefits of prayer; the enthusiasm of his contemplative hours pervaded his working hours to such an extent that he was spared the feeling of aridity which often crowns with thorns the intellectual monarchy of the learned. Certain mediæval monks were preoccupied with the antagonism which

[1] *A mes Séminaristes*, p. 123.

existed, according to them, between scholastic dialectics and mystic intuition, between thought and love, between intellectualism and charity. In a personality like Cardinal Mercier's, this antagonism was resolved, and, in his two books of instruction, *A mes Séminaristes* and *Retraite Pastorale*, the founder of néo-scholasticism took his place with such great doctors as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus, who were at once masters of prayer and of thought.

VI

THE PASTORAL WORK OF CARDINAL MERCIER

ITS SPIRIT OF FRATERNITY AND LOVE

SIX years after his consecration to the episcopate, the Cardinal collected his Pastoral works; they fill three volumes in which many words have the worth of deeds. Head of 3,000 priests and 2,300,000 of the faithful, he was specially anxious to give them directions and to say once for all what had to be said on certain questions. He left to priests and men of action the settlement of practical details, the framing of consequential plans, and the bringing to maturity of the seed which his words provided. He contented himself with showing the way ; it was for them to follow it. He aimed, first of all, at diffusing the right spirit.

Living in a country where, every six years, the victory of the Catholic Party was a temporal

success for the clergy, he felt the need after publicly rejoicing over these electoral triumphs, of moderating by austere advice the dangerous intoxication which might have seized the victors. Sacerdotal pride was foreign to his nature; he deemed the priest's responsibility so heavy that the very greatness of the priesthood became a fresh reason for humility. The Cardinal was opposed to all caste prejudices. He encouraged his priests to appeal to laymen for help and demolished the objections which would prompt them to refuse. He went even as far as to suggest that they might take some laymen as examples,—and what laymen?—working men. Speaking before a popular gathering, he said that, in his young days, he had known a priest who had taken as a model "do you know whom? You will never guess: a working man. Of course, a model working man, that is to say, a modest, honest and conscientious toiler, dividing his day between labour, in the field or in the shop, and the care of his wife and children." And, before the Confraternity of St. Vincent de Paul, he added: "The poor are our masters, they teach us how

to give, how to pray, how to love Christ."[1]

In the Christian life, as conceived by the Cardinal, the believer is willing to learn from those beneath him. In 1907, already clothed in the purple, he reminded some students how he was taught a lesson by one of his own pupils: "This young man to whom I recommended the daily practice of religious observance, pointed out to me that, though it was not always possible for him to attend mass every morning, he never failed to visit either a family in want, or sick persons in whom he was interested, adding that it did not seem to do his religion any harm. These simple words were for me a ray of light. This shows, my dear students, that, despite the fact that we call ourselves your masters, you are often really ours though we are slow to confess it, for must we not safeguard our professorial prestige!"

Thus covering with his authority the attractive audacity of this admission, he thanked the student who had led him to realize that maxim of moral theology according to which "the pressing

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, III, p. 487; II, p. 73: II, p. 381.

material wants of our neighbour may take precedence of even the obligatory practices of the spiritual life."[1]

The caste spirit may easily flourish in pious circles; the Cardinal was aware of the peril. Conferring his blessing on a Brussels confraternity of ladies, he told them frankly: "You form a privileged class. I wish you would accustom yourselves to a broader way of thinking, to a deeper feeling of Christian life. Be ambitious to conquer. Interest yourselves in the spiritual welfare of your kin, of your friends, of your parishioners, of your compatriots, of the whole Catholic world. . . . You must not consider yourselves as belonging to an exclusive set, to a kind of caste within the Christian society The Church knows no caste; the Church is no respecter of persons; the Church seeks the good of all mankind."[2]

The Cardinal was a great teacher of brotherhood; his purple robe, symbol of a maternal church, had a fraternal aspect. He demanded a similar

[1] *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 327.
[2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 271.

standard of all Christians: "Many people of a certain social rank, who bow deeply to a beggar, would be tempted to turn their back on a worker with rough hands, or on a small 'bourgeois' of modest origin; they would blush to shake hands with them or render them a service. Do not follow this example; love every Christian soul. Castes are for India, not for the Church of God. Within the Church, we are all brothers and sisters."[1]

He felt pity for the toiling masses estranged from the Church by the material conditions of their lives. To "help them to emerge from their state of depression and to give more freedom to their soul," he urged Catholics to strengthen the trade organizations and to make the "patronages" centres of positive education, of professional solidarity.[2]

There is another form of caste spirit, a certain pride of orthodoxy; the Cardinal denounced that also. According to him, the correctness of our beliefs does not excuse us from intellectual charity or even charity unqualified. Nobody, however,

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 76.
[2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 94; III, p. 32.

was more attached to this very correctness. Responding to a hint from Pius X, he studied modernism with the broadmindedness of a philosopher and the scrupulous accuracy of a sincere and impartial witness. He declared, however, at the beginning of the present pontificate: "We do not deny that, in certain Catholic countries, more especially in France and in Italy, anti-modernism has driven certain impulsive temperaments, richer in words than in deeds, into insidious personal polemics. It seems as if the profession of the Catholic faith no longer sufficed to these improvised knights of orthodoxy, and that, to obey the Pope more humbly they must defy the authority of the bishops. Self appointed pamphleteers and journalists excommunicated all those who did not submit to their own 'integrism' with good grace. Loyal souls began to be troubled and uneasy, tender consciences suffered in silence. By a single gesture, Benedict XV put things back in their proper place. A stroke of the pen was the death sentence of this blundering integrism."[1]

[1] Mercier, *The Voice of Belgium*, Burns & Oates, London.

Every word told and men's hearts were comforted with the thought that Justice had come by her own. In the Cardinal's diocese, " integrism " could never obtain a hearing. Mgr Mercier issued an order for the celebration of the centenary of Montalembert ; he presided and spoke at it without troubling in the least about the mean opinions expressed on this great man, in certain quarters.

To the Catholics he preached mutual consideration ; he also preached consideration for those who were not of the Church. Whilst explaining that atheistic free thought is incapable of safeguarding morality and that it has lost all claim to suppress crime, he hastened to add : " My remarks bear merely on doctrines ; I refrain from judging those who hold or uphold them. The man who goes astray is always better than his principles, because, in his conscience, there is a natural curb which prevents him from following his error to its logical conclusion. . . . On the other hand, the disciple of truth is always inferior to his programme, because, in the heart of man, there are evil desires which, if not fought against energetically and ceaselessly from youth to age, paralyse

the will and keep it below the ideal to which it aspires.[1]

Such words, rich in meaning, are a fit antidote against Pharisaism. The Cardinal knew how to be cordial with outsiders. Being unwilling that the Church should be ignored or stand aloof, he went, in 1907, to speak beside M. Paul Janson, the Radical tribune, in a general assembly of benevolent societies. "I take a special delight," he exclaimed, "in the feeling of brotherhood which brings me to this assembly. Now that the unity of the Christian belief has been broken, we have seldom the opportunity of meeting, on the common ground of friendly purpose, men of different or of no religious beliefs. I am confident that this unity will be restored one day; I know neither when nor how; but, when I think of the universal interest shown in the working classes, it seems to me that the starting point of our reconciliation will be a feeling of pity for human sufferings, and a common desire to alleviate them."[2]

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, III, p. 345.
[2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 274.

A year later, at Liège, in the course of a lecture on temperance, he begged his audience, which included Catholics and non-Catholics, to "let themselves go, for once, unreservedly in favour of friendly feelings, hopes of agreement, desires for union" and to "pool their enthusiasms." "Forget to-day your religious, political, social, and professional preferences, and remember only that you are my brothers as I am yours, and that we all burn with the same apostolic zeal for our brothers who have fallen by the way suffering, wounded, caught by the devouring maw of the treacherous demon drink."[1] He did not want any human being to remain estranged from the Church, and considered that all social effort inspired by neighbourly love was derived, though sometimes unconsciously, from Christian thought. He believed in our epoch because it is full of such effort; he loved it and wondered if it were not equal to any other; for "the only things which count are acts of charity, that which goes on unseen in our own souls, the life of love dedicated to God,

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, II, p. 144.

the life of union on behalf of our brothers."[1] Even dialectics, which made his reputation, must give way to the genuine power of love: "Read the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles of St. Paul, and I think you will see with astonishment how small a place is occupied by direct attacks upon evil and impiety by these great missionaries. The words which force themselves irresistibly from their burning hearts are nearly always words of love."[2]

Like the apostolic writings the Cardinal's pastoral letters were saturated with love.

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, II, p. 70.
[2] *Ibid*, III, p. 69.

VII

THE INCREASING INFLUENCE OF THE CARDINAL

HIS PATRIOTISM

FROM Louvain to Malines, his influence went on increasing.

In Louvain, he had formed a body of Catholics who, thanks to him, gradually brought into political life not merely traditional opinions, but a doctrine based on facts, no longer vague tendencies, but a philosophical conception of the State and a wealth of social experience. He had thus infused new blood in the only government in Europe officially Catholic. But while his pupils were carrying into public life the commanding influence of the professor, the influence of the pastor over the popular conscience was becoming manifest. Those who, in 1909, were present at the jubilee of Louvain University and the Congress of Malines might have thought that this influence must have reached its climax. The Cardinal's ascetic profile

dominated these assemblies. As time went on the "Grand Abbé" stooped slightly, he was hardly bent; the gradual forward inclination of his shoulders did not suggest release from a load; it was a symbol not of weakness, but of the onward striving of his soul. The light in his eyes showed that persistent joyous enthusiasm, which is the reward of those who sacrifice their life to their work, and this persuasive all-conquering joyfulness made approach to the Cardinal easy despite the majesty of his robes. One felt near him through the enthusiasm which he inspired; his look was a call, a lodestone; he was a living ideal.

The forty thousand men whom the Cardinal addressed at the Malines Congress all belonged to a victorious party. Political victories are only the preludes to defeats if they are a source of vanity. Through the discipline imposed on Christian life and Christian action, the Cardinal was able to restrain these conquerors. With prophetic insight, he had gathered together all the relics of the Belgian saints, and these saints looked down, from their thirty-six shrines, upon

the vast crowd of the faithful who had come to Malines from every corner of the country. He made the dead talk to the living; he placed himself in the wake of the saints; like them, he was a witness, an apostle,—one who came after them all. The members of the Congress took away with them the fine vision of an ancient Belgian Church hovering over new Belgium, and of a Cardinal who endeavoured in vain to efface himself behind these glories of the past which he had brought to life again.

Mgr Mercier found words which touched every Belgian, without any distinction of party. When he spoke of her, Belgium ceased to appear as the most recent creation of European diplomacy; he infused perspective into Belgian history and pride into the Belgian conscience. At the celebration of his episcopal consecration in Malines, he said: "Little Belgium has great ambitions; small as she is, she has made gigantic strides. I recall a memory of my student days. Thirty years ago, our English and American fellow-students accompanied us to the station, when we left for home, and chaffingly begged us, as they imagined our

mothers would have done, to take care of ourselves: 'Above all, dear child, keep the doors well shut.' To-day, our doors are wide open, our national barriers have disappeared; after colonial expansion, we witness world expansion, we have grown ten times stronger, our activity overflows, and our national pride asserts itself."

On another occasion, he rejoiced at finding that "in proportion to its population, Belgium was at the head of all nations in the economic struggle." In a letter signed also by the other bishops, he spoke of the pride of "being Belgian."[1] Certain discussions between Walloons and Flemings seemed to threaten the moral unity of the people; the Cardinal aimed at maintaining this unity. As a young man, he had learned Flemish when very few Walloons learned it; he considered as "anti-Christian, anti-social and anti-national" the prejudices which would drive out Flemish culture.[2] He opened the doors of his own schools and colleges to this culture in a spirit of moderation which guaranteed the continuance of the

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, II, p. 118 and 272.
[2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 156.

innovation. While these internal quarrels threatened to divide little Belgium in two, Leopold II, by acquiring the Congo, was creating a " greater Belgium," and Mgr Mercier raised his voice opportunely to ask that colonization should be a collective act of brotherhood and to pay homage to the sovereign who had opened a vast continent to civilization.[1] " His initiative," declared the Cardinal, " has raised the power and reputation of Belgium to a height which only future generations will be able to appreciate."[2] He thus welcomed every new success of his country. The subject of his Pastoral Letter of 1910 was patriotism ; the words of the Prelate had become one of the guiding forces of the people. Neither Prelate nor people could foresee the cruel ordeal which awaited both of them and was destined to associate them inseparably in the admiration of the world.

[1] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, II, p. 119, 434 and 290.
[2] *Ibid.*, II, p. 421.

VIII

THE CARDINAL AGAINST GERMANY

HIS MORAL VICTORY

THE Cardinal was in Rome for the Conclave when, towards the end of August, 1914, news came to him, like one blow upon another, of the burning of Louvain and of the bombardment of Malines. He looked upon his crucifix, "upon Jesus, bruised, clothed in His blood as in a garment." "The servant is not above his lord," he read in St. Matthew. "Belgium, the servant of Christ, was thus made to accept a privileged place on the mount of Calvary." At each fresh blow which Germany aimed at Belgium, the Cardinal repeated to his flock that Christ was likewise struck. "Would your generous souls have liked our divine Jesus to have suffered alone?" The very life of Christ—the Passion before the Resurrection—death to win life, the Cross to enter into Glory—seemed to him to offer the funda-

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mental solution of the gravest problems of individual and national life.[1]

Besides, expiation was necessary. For the Cardinal, the idea of expiation, far from being directed against the sins of other people, became humbly and profoundly persuasive to sincere acts of contrition: "And we clergy, priests, bishops, whose sublime mission is to reflect in our lives more even than in our words, the Gospel of Christ, have we really acquired the right to repeat to our people the words of the Apostle of the Gentiles: 'Be ye followers of me as I endeavour to follow Christ'? We were working, we were also praying, but this was not enough. Our duty is to expiate the sins of the world. What was the main tendency of our lives, self-indulgence or expiation?"[2]

Before coming back to his oppressed flock, the Belgian Primate arranged that the priest should expiate for the faithful and the faithful for the priest, and that he himself should have his share in the common bearing of the cross.

[1] Mercier, *The Voice of God.*
[2] *Ibid.*

In September, 1914, he re-entered his diocese, witnessed the resistance and fall of Antwerp and, following the road taken by the invaders, went, from village to village, visiting his people. Some villages had disappeared completely and of others two-thirds; nine-tenths of the houses had been destroyed. Pressing around him, the inhabitants related to him the wholesale shootings, the deportations, the burnings, the massacre of priests which had taken place. The Cardinal perceived among the suffering people some movements of revolt against the God who had allowed all this. He wished to calm them, to teach them how to suffer and do penance and, at Christmas, 1914, he published his letter *Patriotism and Endurance.*

Suffering implied neither silence nor giving in. The Cardinal's letter itself was a challenge in the name of Right. The Belgian Government was at Le Havre; the King was at the Front; Germany ruled in Brussels, but the Cardinal was there, Germany's judge. He proclaimed the autocracy of right; he declared that to "affirm the absolute necessity of the subordination of all things to Right, to Justice, and to Truth was implicitly to

affirm God." In the name of religion, he glorified the heroism of the Belgian soldiers, avengers of Right. In Italy, in Holland, certain clever people had said: "Why did not Belgium make merely a show of resistance?" "It would have been unworthy of her," he replied, "for the rights of conscience are sovereign."

He stated the attitude which ought to be adopted towards the "persons who were holding dominion in Belgium by military force." Their regulations were to be obeyed as long as "they did not violate their liberty of conscience as Christians or their dignity as patriots." The authority of the occupying power, however, "was no lawful authority; in their inmost soul they owed it neither respect, nor attachment, nor obedience."[1] The strength of the Cardinal lay in the fact that he was at the same time the echo and the guide of the conscience of the people; he spoke to Germany in the name of Belgium, and to both countries in the name of God.

The letter was seized, the publisher and the priests who persisted in reading it from the pulpit

[1] *Voice of Belgium*, p. 44.

were imprisoned, and Governor von Bissing summoned the Cardinal to explain. Mgr Mercier stayed in his palace, noted the fact that he had been placed under arrest for three days and protested publicly in the name of his rights as citizen, his prerogatives as bishop and his honour as cardinal. Germany wanted him to defend or excuse himself ; instead of complying he asked for explanations from Germany. Taken aback, Germany drew back ; she restored to the Cardinal the right to wander among the prostrate ruins of his country and its upright souls. As for the offending letter, it passed beyond the frontiers. Von Bissing's agents had vainly attempted to place under a bushel the fierce light it threw on the German atrocities. In France, in England, in Italy this light was set on a candlestick and King Albert, worthy sovereign of such a citizen, wrote to Pope Benedict that, " like the great bishops of the past, the Archbishop of Malines had not feared to proclaim the imprescriptible rights of a just cause before the conscience of the world."

While his enemies were discussing how they might better prosecute him, the Cardinal took up

his pastoral work, dividing his time between his oratory, his episcopal writings, his visits to ruined districts and the organization of relief committees. In each of his Charges, a few striking lines aimed at maintaining Belgian energy under the German yoke. It was sometimes a wish for the " repression of the outrages which had disturbed European peace " or an allusion to the victory of the Marne, or an invitation to pray " particularly for the souls of the Belgian and Allied soldiers."[1] Alone in silent Belgium, he was able to free the souls of the people in freeing his own. Confronted by the German crimes, he appealed to God ; confronted by " the impudent accusation of the German Imperial Government " relating to supposed Belgian cruelties, which he stigmatized as calumnies, he appealed to the German bishops.[2]

The latter refused to take part in an inquiry which could only vindicate Belgian honour, but, in January, 1916, Mgr Mercier left for Rome. Desirous of forestalling him, Cardinal von Hartmann, of Cologne, had undertaken the same

[1] *The Voice of Belgium*, p. 151.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

journey a few weeks before, but had brought nothing with him worthy of publication for the benefit of the German cause. Mgr Mercier followed him; from railway station to railway station, Italy, the country of Roman law and Canon law, acclaimed him in the name of Right. He received the homage of the Capitol and accepted this tribute publicly as "the greeting addressed by the Roman municipality to a martyred people and to a King of flawless heroism." He visited the Pope and the Cardinals and showed them the documents which the German bishops had, for good reasons, refused to examine. On his departure from Rome, the Cardinal received a portrait from the Pope on which the Sovereign Pontiff had written: "To our revered brother, Cardinal Mercier, We give the apostolic blessing with all our heart, assuring him that We are always with him and that We share his grief and his anguish, inasmuch as his cause is Our cause." In a Pastoral Letter published on his return, he spoke of his journey, commented upon these lines, and declared that, more than ever, he had the natural and supernatural conviction

of final victory and showed that " the moral triumph of Belgium, in the eyes of civilization and history, was already an accomplished fact."[1]

Not only the publisher, but also the Cardinal's secretary were thrown into prison, and von Bissing wrote to Mgr Mercier a threatening letter calling him to account. " Why has my secretary been arrested ? Why has my correspondence been opened ? " retorted the Cardinal proudly. Once more German arrogance drew back, and, thanks to von Bissing's blundering, another page was added to the story of " Belgium's moral triumph."

According to the German Press, Belgium was no more. From the pulpit of Ste. Gudule, the Cardinal proclaimed that she was greater than ever and that when, in 1930, she celebrated her centenary, the present years would appear as the " most brilliant and the most glorious in her history."[2] But they were only bright and glorious because the sufferings endured were accompanied by the protests that Justice demanded. When he witnessed the measures of deportation taken in

[1] *The Voice of Belgium*, p. 215.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

October–December, 1916, against 90,000 Belgian citizens, Mgr Mercier sent one protest after another to the German authorities and obtained the intervention of the Pope. His fraternal feelings revolted against these measures and the arbitrary way in which they were applied only to the working classes. He claimed for the "bourgeoisie" and for his own clergy a share in the sacrifice imposed upon the nation. He was at the same time sympathetic with all suffering and in revolt against all injustice. It was not so much the cruelty of the sacrifice as its illegality which stirred his protests; he appealed "to the reprobation of the civilized world, the judgment of history, and the justice of God."[1]

The details of his personal relations with the German authorities will be revealed later.[2] Each new outrage of Germany denounced by the Cardinal appeared to the Belgian nation as a fresh reason for vindicating their rights. Mgr Mercier recalled that such vindication "was

[1] *The Voice of God*, p. 259.

[2] See Fernand Mayence: "*La Correspondance de S.E. le Cardinal Mercier avec le gouvernement allemand*, 1914–1918, Brussels, Dewit, 1919.

considered as a virtue by St. Thomas since it aimed at saving something which can neither be weighed nor measured nor confiscated, Right, Honour, Peace, Liberty."

German Catholics were amazed to hear, in January, 1917, that the Cardinal was addressing to his clergy a solemn allocution on avenging justice. They hastened in their blundering way, to found a league to disarm this justice which they began to fear, and to unite again with their Belgian fellow-believers in the bonds of "Christian brotherhood." There are circumstances in which the use of certain words is a sacrilege. "The Germans," declared the Cardinal, "want to make us forget the terrible past which we owe to them. Our duty is simply to insist on the re-establishment of outraged Right, the punishment of the guilty, and the provision of guarantees for the future; any other attitude would make us the accomplices of our murderers. A crime committed openly against our nation cannot be merely forgiven!" The idea of Right—a Right which demanded reparation—inspired all the Cardinal's actions and prevailed alike over brutal menaces and empty offers of friendship.

The few weeks of August, 1914, served to dispel for ever the illusions of the " modern conscience." People had believed in the moral efficacy of Science, and Science, as handled by the astute German, appeared as an instrument of crime. They had flattered themselves that they had produced, in the Hague Conferences—at which the Pope was not represented,—an international morality. Frail, like all purely human works, this lay international law had been cruelly violated by one of the contracting parties which happened to be the most powerful at the time. They had acclaimed the speculative boldness of intellectual Germany ; and fighting Germany, messenger of the right of Might, sought and found her own apology in the writings of her own thinkers. After so many disappointments, modern conscience was somewhat relieved at seeing this Cardinal confronting German militarism in the name of the superiority of morality and of its inviolable predominance over a right emanating from sheer force. An arrogant Hegelianism, represented beyond the Alps by the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, accused Mgr Mercier of " mental

senility,"[1] because he dared to give a new lease of life to old ideas which proved inconvenient to Germany. But these ancient and traditional truths revealed themselves as the salvation of humanity; principles which had been deemed obsolete were suddenly endowing the protests with invincible power.

The modern conscience, through a kind of habit, looked from time to time towards its old master, Kant, whose moral ideal she had tendered to the masses. It seemed as if this master was effaced, hid himself, vanished. Truly Kant had wished for eternal Peace, but it was "from the point of view of the noumenon"; as to the world of "phenomenon"—and it was in this world that the Germany of William II moved—this kind-hearted philosopher considered that war was the indispensable means of attaining the transcendent end: Peace. He spoke most eloquently of the moral life, but he added that "the spirit can do nothing to modify matter and that matter was therefore for ever condemned to remain purely material, that is to say, opposed to the spirit: mechanical,

[1] *La Critica*, 1916, XIV, p. 81.

inert, a blind force, the source of egotism and wickedness." He thus kept natural life and moral life strictly apart, producing " a radical and absolute dualism."[1] Unconsciously this proud master of pure morals—far too pure—acquitted material life and matter just as formerly Luther, by his doctrine of nature and grace, happened to acquit sin. The invaders of Belgium seemed to remember specially these conclusions of their two great teachers.

Speaking, in 1908, of the modern conscience to an assembly of young barristers in Antwerp, Cardinal Mercier had already shown how Kantism, with its artificial distinctions and its water-tight compartments, " led humanity to an impasse." He explained that it was only possible " to protect the integrity of moral consciousness by giving up Kant's interpretation of the sentiment of duty." He pointed out the difficulties of Kantism and opposed to it the synthesis of Catholic philosophy.[2] . . . A few years later Kant's moral philosophy

[1] Émile Boutroux, *Morale Kantienne et Morale Humaine. Revue Bleue*, March 10th, 1917.
[2] Mercier, *Œuvres Pastorales*, II, p. 44.

appeared among the vanquished in the war. One felt that German excesses and German frightfulness might with a little hair-splitting find in certain aspects of this philosophy a sort of absolution. The modern conscience, somewhat disappointed in this philosophy, which it had loved so much, beheld the Cardinal raising the standard of another morality far more exacting in regard to human actions. Some years before he had as professor laid its foundations and defined its advantages; to-day, as pastor and champion of the people, he found a painful opportunity of putting it to the test and of showing the resources which it possessed for upholding the weak and humbling the strong. It seemed as if these terrible months unified the two periods of his life. Only ruins were left in his dear Louvain, but the spirit of Louvain still inspired the words in which the philosopher, now Church leader, vindicated Belgium and the honour of human kind.

IX

CARDINAL MERCIER'S PERSONALITY

HIS DAILY SUBMISSION TO THE PRESENT DUTY

WHEN accepting the Belgian primacy, Mgr Mercier said: "I do not want to lament over a past which is no more, or to dream foolishly of a future which is not yet. Man's duty is concentrated on one point, the action of the present moment. What, for each one of us, is the end of secondary causes, of which Providence held the threads in our past lives? One thing only, the preparation for the present. It is this present time then, this providential disposing of to-day, that we want to worship, to bless, and realize fearlessly, though with fear and anguish of heart."[1]

These words, which marked a decisive turning point in his career, sum up his philosophy of life.

There are some great men who aim at ruling

[1] *Œuvres Pastorales*, I, p. 23.

circumstances or even at creating them, and who put all their skill and their pride in directing and subjecting to their will the events affecting the course of their lives. They delight in imprinting on their time the improvisations of their will. They flatter themselves by inserting arbitrarily in the book of history, which is open before them, a certain number of blank pages, in filling them with their own personality and deranging the sequel. Their caprice which, according to Bossuet, is only a slave of the Divine counsels, appears to them the superb dictator of human evolution. It seems as if they thought themselves competing with God, whilst they are only His unconscious agents.

Far from them, in a shadow which is suddenly illuminated at certain hours of history, appear other great men who do not become, through their pride, as playthings in the hands of God. Their devotion prompts them deliberately to offer themselves to God as helpers; they aspire to serve, rather than to rule; they do every day what has to be done, and their duty is "first of all concerned with the Present." Cardinal Mercier stands before

us as a magnificent example of this type of greatness. To rise to the height of circumstances is sometimes more difficult than to contrive them. There is a way of obeying them which is the opposite of slavery; there is a way of adapting oneself to them which almost implies a kind of sovereign power. This was Cardinal Mercier's way.

Mankind boasts of producing, from time to time, certain men, and of taking their true measure. But the dimensions attributed to them are arbitrary, and some men have acquired the reputation of being great who might have appeared very small in the light of great events. When such events occur, they test the measurements taken by man; while a few grow greater, many grow less. The latter had only acquired an artificial greatness; the former had not waited to be truly great for the moment of history which showed them to be so. They are great because they were great; they appear greater because their conception of duty is higher, a height their greatness reaches without any effort.

Take away for a moment the beneficent personality of Leo XIII and the mischievous

personality of William II ; forget this Pope who made a new dawn pierce the twilight of the nineteenth century ; forget this Emperor who made our twentieth century wade through inexpiable seas of blood. Take both away, Mgr Mercier's career would have had the same starting-point : a chair of philosophy in the seminary of Malines. Thanks to the nobility of his sacerdotal character and to his intellectual qualities, known to a small circle, his career would very likely have ended in the same way. He would have become a bishop, probably the Bishop of Malines. Men would have seen him live and die in the same surroundings, without suspecting his greatness.

But, because there was a Leo XIII and because there was alas a William of Hohenzollern, there were two occasions in which the simple impulse of present duty, sole motive of his actions, made of this young priest a scientific initiator and of this oppressed old man a prophet of liberation whose voice was heard throughout the world. The power which he exerted on the moral life of civilized mankind

was only the blossoming of a humble obedience. It consecrates the scrupulous care with which, at every moment, he did what he had to do and also his faithful acceptance of the evil sufficient for the day. It gave to him, besides, a divine joyfulness, the reward of his constant devotion to daily duty.

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